

# The Spirit of 1914

*Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany*

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*Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Bonn*



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## Introduction:

### The myth of the “spirit of 1914”

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In August 1914 Germany went to war. The war was not unexpected. It had been brewing for quite a while. Yet when it came it came suddenly and, like a whirlwind, transformed German public opinion. In the afternoon of 28 June newspaper vendors sold “extras” telling of the murder of the Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince. For a few days there was excitement in the streets, and small crowds formed around the newspaper stands. Yet this fever quickly subsided. After the first week of July there was almost no mention in the press of Austrian–Serbian foreign relations, or of foreign relations at all. Instead, newspapers contained the sorts of diversions that made for pleasant reading alongside a glass of beer in the good summer weather: the trial of Rosa Luxemburg for anti-militaristic remarks, the scandals in France, and yet another call from the right for patriotic Germans to join together to fight the peril of Social Democracy.

On 23 July this changed. Newspapers reported that Austria had issued Serbia an ultimatum, due to expire on Saturday, 25 July at 6.00 p.m. Readers need not be reminded that as Germany was allied with Austria this could lead to German involvement in a European conflagration. In the late afternoon on 25 July vast crowds of curious and excited people gathered in the larger German cities at the sites where they expected the news of the Serbian response first to be distributed: at the city squares downtown, in front of the newspaper office buildings, in the downtown cafés. After learning that Serbia had rejected the ultimatum, in Berlin and a few other large cities “parades” of enthusiastic youths marched through the streets, singing patriotic songs.

The next week Germans wondered if they would be going to war. Crowds of curious people gathered where the extras would first be distributed, in public squares or in front of the newspaper buildings. As the week continued the curious crowds grew in size. People waited for hours, wondering about their fate. The tension was palpable. Finally, on 31 July the news came: the proclamation of the state of siege. The next day even more nervous, curious people gathered in public squares and in front of

the newspaper buildings, waiting for the extras which, in the afternoon, informed them of the mobilization. Germany was at war.

In many places the extras stating that Germany was at war were greeted with a chorus of patriotic outbursts, people yelling hurrah and singing patriotic songs, which many contemporaries and most historians have characterized as “war enthusiasm.” On 1 August 1914 tens of thousands in front of the Berlin castle broke out in what seemed to many contemporaries to be a “religious” ecstasy when the Kaiser spoke to his people, proclaiming from a castle window that he no longer recognized any parties, he knew only Germans.

The first month of the war resembled a month-long patriotic festival. In the first three weeks of August Germans said good-bye to their troops, smothering them with flowers and so much chocolate that the Red Cross asked the population to be less generous; the soldiers were getting sick.<sup>1</sup> At the end of August Germans celebrated the news of the first successful battles with exuberance, as if the war had been won. The national flag flew everywhere, even in the courtyards of Berlin’s working-class apartment houses, where it had never been seen before.

When published in newspapers or shown in movie-house newsreels, the photographs of the August enthusiasm had an immediate “historic” aura. In the next few days and weeks journalists, politicians, and government officials contributed to this aura by employing a religious vocabulary to describe what was already known as the “August experiences.” The “war enthusiasm” was a “holy” moment,<sup>2</sup> a “holy flame of anger,”<sup>3</sup> “heroic,”<sup>4</sup> a “revelation,”<sup>5</sup> it had brought forth a “rebirth through war,”<sup>6</sup> had brought Germans “out of the misery of everyday life to new heights.”<sup>7</sup> “What Germany has experienced in these days was a miracle, a renewal of oneself; it was a shaking off of everything small and foreign; it was a most powerful recognition of one’s own nature,” wrote a *Tägliche Rundschau* journalist.<sup>8</sup> “Whatever the future may have in store for us,” Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg stated at the close of the 4 August session

<sup>1</sup> See the letter from Prof. Dr. Messerer, 4 September 1914, Staatsarchiv München, Polizeidirektion, no. 4556.

<sup>2</sup> Gottfried Traub, “Heilige Gegenwart,” *Illustrierte Zeitung* (Leipzig), no. 3713, 27 August 1914, p. 344.

<sup>3</sup> “Eine erhebende Kundgebung des geistigen Berlins,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, 4 August 1914, no. 211, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> “Der Siegestag,” *Tägliche Rundschau*, 24 August 1914, no. 398 (Sonder-Ausgabe), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> “In der Reichshauptstadt,” *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 August 1914, no. 182, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Oscar Schmitz, “Die Wiedergeburt durch den Krieg,” *Der Tag*, 9 August 1914, no. 185.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Wilhelm Pressel, *Die Kriegspredigt 1914–1918 in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands* (Göttingen, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> H. R., “Mobilisierung in Deutschland und in Frankreich,” *Tägliche Rundschau*, 2 August 1914, no. 358 (Morgen), p. 1.



of parliament, "the fourth of August 1914 will, for all time, remain one of Germany's greatest days."<sup>9</sup> "One will speak and talk of this first week of August as long as the German people exist and the German language sounds. Whoever was able to experience it, he will be accompanied by its pictures and its emotions as long as he lives," wrote a *Tägliche Rundschau* journalist on 9 August.

As time passed the "spirit of 1914" would be invoked as an experience and a goal, as a holy memory and a utopian future. The "spirit of 1914," wrote the Berlin historian Friedrich Meinecke in late 1914, must be the "victory prize."<sup>10</sup> Future generations, wrote the journalist Ferdinand Avenarius in October 1914, would judge their present by how much of the "spirit of 1914" remained.<sup>11</sup> On 1 August 1915 the theologian Gottfried Traub claimed that "the August days . . . will remain a source of future strength, destroying all doubters."<sup>12</sup> The young author Walter Flex professed in 1916:

It is my belief that the German spirit in August 1914 and after achieved heights such as no people before or after has seen. Happy is he who has stood at this peak and did not have to climb down. The following generations of Germans and other nations will look at this, God's water mark, as the edge of the border from which they walk forward.<sup>13</sup>

After the war the memory of 1914 would be invoked as an ideal and a goal. Gustav Stresemann claimed at the 1921 conference of the Liberal German People's Party that "never did a people stand purer before God and history than the German people in 1914." If we have "not been able to find our way back to the unity of 1914," continued Stresemann, "it must remain our goal."<sup>14</sup> The *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* wrote on the ten-year anniversary of the beginning of the war, one year after the Ruhr crisis, that we must look back to the "spirit of 1914" to "awaken the belief in the future of our own people."<sup>15</sup> Gertrud Bäumer, one of Germany's leading female politicians and journalists, wrote in her memoirs, pub-

<sup>9</sup> Bethmann Hollweg's speech is reprinted in Ralph Lutz (ed.), *Fall of the German Empire 1914–1918. Documents of the German Revolution*, vol. I (Stanford, 1932), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, "Um welche Güter kämpfen wir (19 August 1914)," pp. 50–51; and "Staatsgedanke und Nationalismus (October 1914)," p. 76, both in Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Erhebung von 1914. Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1914). Similarly, the Berlin law professor, Wilhem Kahl, in "Dr. Kahls Rede in schwerer Zeit," *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 10 October 1914, BAL, RLB Pressearchiv, no. 7565, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ferdinand Avenarius, "Die neue Zeit," *Der Kunstwart* 28, no. 1 (October, 1914), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Gottfried Traub, "Deutschlands Schwerttag," *Eiserne Blätter*, 1 August 1915, BA, Abt. Koblenz, NL Traub, no. 7, no p.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Flex, quoted in Benno Schneider and Ulrich Haacke (eds.), *Das Buch vom Kriege, 1914–1918. Urkunden, Berichte, Briefe, Erinnerungen* (Ebenhausen, 1933) p. 37.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *Nationalliberale Correspondenz*, 1 December 1921, BAL, 62 DAF 3, no. 697, p. 176.

<sup>15</sup> "Den Kriegsoffern," *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 3 August 1924, no. 209, p. 5.

lished in 1933, that “come what may . . . the memory of that Sunday [1 August] will remain and will continue to be a value in itself.”<sup>16</sup> In 1933 the National Socialists claimed that the origins of the present “revolution” lay in the “spirit of 1914.” They described their accession to power as a recreation of the days of 1914. On 21 March 1933, the “Day at Potsdam” when Hitler and Hindenburg shook hands, the minister at the official church service, Dr. Dibelius, interpreted this symbolic handshake as the renewal of the “spirit of 1914,” thus demonstrating that others saw it that way, too.<sup>17</sup>

What engendered such rhetoric? Certainly the August “experiences” were powerful. In August 1914 one had to be peculiarly dull not to feel the emotions C. E. Montague has so poignantly described (in a different context):

the evening before a great battle must always make fires leap up in the mind . . . For there the wits and the heart may be really astir and at gaze, and the common man may have, for the hour, the artist’s vision of life as an adventure and challenge, lovely, harsh, fleeting, and strange. The great throw, the new age’s impending nativity, Fate with her fingers approaching the veil, about to lift – a sense of these things is a drug as strong as strychnine to quicken the failing pulse of the most heart-weary of moribund raptures.<sup>18</sup>

Yet some contemporaries not only asserted that these experiences were exciting, they interpreted them as a liminal moment, what Paul Tillich (in a different context) has termed a *Kairos*: “an outstanding moment in the temporal process, a moment in which the eternal breaks into the temporal – shaking and transforming it, creating a crisis in the depth of human existence.”<sup>19</sup> In this “internal transformation,”<sup>20</sup> this purification of the soul, this “rebirth through war,”<sup>21</sup> when individual and collective identities were transformed, Germans felt the ecstasy that accompanies the belief that eternal truths and reality have become one. In the words of Rudolf Eucken, a philosophy professor and a Nobel laureate in literature:

an exultation took place, a transformation of an ethical nature. We felt ourselves placed completely in the service of a higher task, a task which we ourselves had

<sup>16</sup> Gertrud Bäumer, *Lebensweg durch eine Zeitwende* (Tübingen, 1933), pp. 264–265.

<sup>17</sup> Thus, as on 4 August 1914, the text for the sermon was Romans 8, verse 31: “If God is for us, who can be against us.”

<sup>18</sup> C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (Westport, 1978, first published 1922), p. 122.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago, 1949), p. 45, and “Kairos. Ideen zur Geisteslage der Gegenwart,” in Paul Tillich (ed.), *Kairos. Zur Geisteslage und Geisteswendung* (Darmstadt, 1926), pp. 1–21.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Mayr, “Wilhelm II,” *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* 11 (September 1914), p. 790.

<sup>21</sup> Oscar Schmitz, *Das wirkliche Deutschland. Die Wiedergeburt durch den Krieg* (Munich, 1915), pp. 4 ff.; Schmitz, “Die Wiedergeburt durch den Krieg,” *Der Tag*, 9 August 1914, no. 185.

not sought, but which had been placed upon us by a higher power, and which had therefore the compelling power of an imperative duty . . . We experienced a powerful upswing in our souls: the life of the whole became directly the life of each individual, everything stale was swept away, new fountains of life opened themselves up. We felt ourselves taken above ourselves, and we were full of burning desire to turn this new consciousness into action.<sup>22</sup>

The enthusiasm made Germans more religious, more courageous, more masculine, more authentic, brought the end of the "the superficiality of the soul and the mind, the drive for fun and pleasure."<sup>23</sup>

Above all, the "August experiences" were an experience of fraternity, of community, and a catalyst that would create what would later be termed the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In the words of the sociologist Emil Lederer, writing in 1915, "during the days of mobilization the society (*Gesellschaft*) which had existed transformed itself into a community (*Gemeinschaft*)."<sup>24</sup> It was here, in describing the nature of their experience of community, that contemporaries found their most colorful, their most inspired language. The conservative minister Eduard Schwartz professed:

The *Volk* has risen up as the only thing which has value and which will last. Over all individual fates stands that which we feel as the highest reality: the experience of belonging together.<sup>25</sup>

The theologian Ernst Troeltsch asserted:

Under this incredible pressure German life melted in that indescribable wonderful unity of sacrifice, brotherhood, belief, and certainty of victory which was, and is, the meaning of the unforgettable August.<sup>26</sup>

According to the liberal journalist Hellmut von Gerlach, "prejudices have fallen, false opinions have been corrected, people, divided before by enormous mountains, have come to see one another as comrades (*Volksgenossen*)."<sup>27</sup> The liberal journalist and feminist Gertrud Bäumer claimed that in August 1914 "the limitations of our egos broke down, our blood flowed to the blood of the other, we felt ourselves one body in a mystical unification."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Rudolf Eucken, "Der Sturm bricht los!," *Deutsche Kriegswochenschau*, 29 July 1917, no. 34, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Otto von Pfister, *Neues deutsches Leben und Streben*, second edition (Berlin, 1915), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Emil Lederer, "Zur Soziologie des Weltkrieges," in *Kapitalismus, Klassenstruktur und Probleme der Demokratie in Deutschland 1910–1940* (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 120–121. The essay is from 1915.

<sup>25</sup> Eduard Schwartz, *Der Krieg als nationales Erlebnis. Rede gehalten im Saal der Aubette zu Straßburg am 24. Oktober 1914* (Strasbourg, 1914), pp. 2–3.

<sup>26</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Kulturkrieg* (Berlin, 1915), pp. 25–26.

<sup>27</sup> Hellmut von Gerlach, "Das Jahr des Umsturzes," *Die Welt am Montag* 20, no. 52 (28 December 1914), pp. 1–2.

<sup>28</sup> Gertrud Bäumer, "Frauenleben und Frauenarbeit," in Max Schwarte (ed.), *Der Weltkrieg in seiner Einwirkung auf das deutsche Volk* (Leipzig, 1918), p. 314.

Did this account of the “August experiences” accurately describe the emotions and feelings of the German people in 1914? Curiously, only recently have historians turned their attention to this question. Although there is an enormous literature on the outbreak of the First World War, on “war guilt,” on the actions, intentions, and motivations of government officials, until recently most historians simply accepted contemporaries’ accounts of German public opinion in 1914 as “enthusiastic” without systematically analyzing or investigating it.<sup>29</sup> George Mosse has typically written that the outbreak of war was met with “indescribable enthusiasm.” Modris Eksteins saw the August experiences as a German “*Frühlingsfeier*, her rite of spring.” Eric J. Leed claimed that “August 1914 was the last great national incarnation of the ‘people’ as a unified moral entity.”<sup>30</sup>

Historians engaged in local histories on First World War Germany have suggested, however, that the mood of the population in July and August 1914 cannot be adequately explained by the adjective “enthusiastic.” Klaus Schwarz noted in his 1971 history of Nuremberg in the First World War that “the population of Nuremberg reacted to the increasing possibility of war in a much more nuanced manner than is expressed by the cliché of broad war enthusiasm.”<sup>31</sup> Volker Ullrich came to similar conclusions in his 1976 study of Hamburg,<sup>32</sup> Friedhelm Boll in his 1981 study of Braunschweig and Hanover,<sup>33</sup> Michael Stöcker in his 1994 study of Darmstadt,<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang Kruse in his 1994 study of the German working class and the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) in 1914,<sup>35</sup> Benjamin Ziemann in his 1997 study of the wartime experience in rural

<sup>29</sup> See Wolfgang Jäger, *Historische Forschung und politische Kultur in Deutschland. Die Debatte 1914–1980 über den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Göttingen, 1984). Nor was this tendency limited to academic literature. In two popular books on the outbreak of the First World War there was also little discussion of the “spirit of 1914”: Eugen Fischer, *Die kritischen 39 Tage. Von Sarajewo bis zum Weltbrand* (Berlin, 1928); and Emil Ludwig, *Juli 14. Vorabend zweier Weltkriege* (Hamburg, 1961 [first published in 1929]).

<sup>30</sup> George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, 1990), p. 70; Modris Eksteins, *The Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Era* (Boston, 1989), p. 94; Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land. Combat and Identity in First World War* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 30. The most recent example in this vein is Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Klaus Dietrich Schwarz in his *Weltkrieg und Revolution in Nürnberg. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Stuttgart, 1971), p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> Volker Ullrich, *Die Hamburger Arbeiterbewegung vom Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Revolution 1918/1919* (Hamburg, 1976), p. 11; and *Kriegsalltag. Hamburg im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Cologne, 1982).

<sup>33</sup> Friedhelm Boll, *Massenbewegungen in Niedersachsen 1906–1920. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu den unterschiedlichen Entwicklungstypen Braunschweig und Hannover* (Bonn, 1981), p. 151.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Stöcker, *Augusterlebnis 1914 in Darmstadt. Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Darmstadt, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Wolfgang Kruse, *Krieg und nationale Integration: eine Neuinterpretation des sozialdemokratischen Burgfriedensschlusses 1914/1915* (Essen, 1993).

Bavaria,<sup>36</sup> and Christian Geinitz in his 1998 study of Freiburg.<sup>37</sup> Although these works have gone a long way toward reforming the traditional view of the history of the August experiences, we still lack a study of German public opinion in July and August 1914 as a whole.<sup>38</sup> What were the German people feeling and thinking in those warm days in July and August 1914? How broad was the "war enthusiasm?" What were the geographical, occupational, and temporal variations in the way Germans greeted the outbreak of the war? What emotions are described by "war enthusiasm?" And what were the other emotions people felt in these exciting and confusing days? The first part of this book (chapters 1–3) attempts to answer these questions.

The second part (chapters 4–8) concentrates on the creation, genealogy, and reception of a narrative of the meaning of the August experiences, a narrative that contemporaries termed the "spirit of 1914." This narrative was one of the most important narratives of the war. On 31 July 1916 Theodor Wolff, the editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, wrote:

Two years ago today the state of siege was declared . . . We know how false it is when *Temps* and similar newspapers reassure their readers that the German people greeted the outbreak of war with joy. Our people had heavy hearts; the possibility of war was a frightening giant nightmare which caused us many sleepless nights. The determination with which we went to war sprang not from joy, but from duty. Only a few talked of a "fresh, wonderful war." Only a very few, too, in comparison to the great masses, found flags immediately after the Austrian ultimatum and marched in front of the windows of the allied embassies, including the Italian, and in front of the Chancellor's office, screaming themselves hoarse.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Ziemann, *Front und Heimat. Ländliche Kriegserfahrungen im südlichen Bayern 1914–1923* (Essen, 1997), pp. 39–54. Other local studies, such as Karl-Dietrich Ay, *Die Entstehung einer Revolution. Die Volksstimmung in Bayern während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1968), Eberhard Lucas, *Die Sozialdemokratie in Bremen während des ersten Weltkrieges* (Bremen, 1969), Gunter Bers (ed.), *Die Kölner Sozialdemokratie und der Kriegausbruch* (Hamburg, 1974), and Detlef Joscak, *Die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung in Düsseldorf* (Hamburg, 1980), do not investigate war enthusiasm in 1914. For a brief account of the mood among the working classes in the Ruhr, see Jürgen Reulecke, "Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Arbeiterbewegung im rheinisch-westfälischen Industriegebiet," in *Arbeiterbewegung an Rhein und Ruhr. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung in Rheinland-Westfalen* (Wuppertal, 1974), pp. 205–239, especially pp. 210 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Christian Geinitz, *Kriegsfurcht und Kampfbereitschaft. Das Augusterlebnis in Freiburg. Eine Studie zum Kriegsbeginn 1914* (Essen, 1998). This work appeared after I had completed this book.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Reithel's *Das "Wunder" der inneren Einheit. Studien zur deutschen und französischen Öffentlichkeit bei Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Bonn, 1996) by concentrating almost exclusively on newspapers, is unable to go beyond impressionistic accounts of the German public realm at the beginning of the war.

<sup>39</sup> T. W., untitled, *Berliner Tageblatt*, 31 July 1916, no. 387, p. 1, reprinted in Theodor Wolff, *Vollendete Tatsachen 1914–1917* (Berlin, 1918), p. 119.

Upon reading this, the Berlin censor, the Oberkommando in den Marken, General von Kessel, forbade indefinitely the newspaper's further publication. Kessel was upset, he wrote to Wolff, because "the many thousands who two years ago gave joyful expression to their patriotic feelings are described as an insignificant lump of hoarse screamers."<sup>40</sup> Although the *Berliner Tageblatt*, one of Germany's most respected newspapers, had many difficulties with censors during the war, this was its most serious crisis. Only Wolff's promise that he would not write any more articles during the war convinced Kessel to allow the *Berliner Tageblatt* to resume publication. (The prohibition against Wolff was lifted in November 1916.)

Why was a certain memory of the August experiences so important to Kessel? Certainly Kessel was not angry because he believed Wolff's version to be historically inaccurate. Rather, aware (whether consciously or unconsciously) that modern political power cannot be sustained through physical coercion but only through consensus, Kessel and compatriots aimed to turn a certain narrative of the history of the "spirit of 1914" into a social myth, that is, an important, unquestioned historical narrative. Kessel hoped to inscribe in the myth of the "spirit of 1914" the conservative norms and values, and to make this narrative the representation of the "common sense" of the German political culture, "the values, expectations, and implicit rules that expressed and shaped collective intentions and actions."<sup>41</sup> The conservative history of the "spirit of 1914" claimed that all Germans had felt that peculiar emotion known to contemporaries as "war enthusiasm," that in this moment of enthusiasm they had become not only aware of their common national identity – the ideas a community shares as beliefs – but that the best description of that identity, of what was German, was found in the conservative ideology. This conservative history of the "spirit of 1914" was thus a narrative of a past

<sup>40</sup> Kessel's 1 August 1916 letter, as well as the correspondence which followed, is in BAL, Reichsamt des Innern, no. 12276, pp. 247 ff., and in BAL, Reichskanzlei, no. 1392, p. 24. Theodor Wolff's reflections on the affair can be found in his diary, *Tagebücher 1914–1918*, vol. II (Boppard am Rhein, 1984), pp. 406 ff.

<sup>41</sup> This is Lynn Hunt's definition of "political culture" in her *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 10. I have discussed aspects of my understanding of the mythical nature of the narrative of the "spirit of 1914" in "Der Mythos des 'Geistes von 1914' in der Weimarer Republik," in Wolfgang Bialas and Bernhard Stenzel (eds.), *Die Weimarer Republik zwischen Metropole und Provinz. Intellektuellendiskurse zur politischen Kultur* (Weimar, 1996), pp. 85–96. My understanding of political myth owes much to William McNeil, "The Care and Repair of Public Myth," in *Mythistory and other Essays* (Chicago, 1986), pp. 23 ff.; Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, 1922); Leszek Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth* (Chicago, 1989); Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven, 1946); and Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie* (Frankfurt/Main, 1982). My understanding of collective, or social memory has benefited especially from James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992).

event, but with a purpose distinctly in the present. Indeed, given the myth-makers’ intentions, it is not surprising that their myth of the “spirit of 1914,” an account of the history of German public opinion in July and August 1914, became increasingly more removed from its real history. As Northrop Frye has noted: “a myth, in nearly all its senses, is a narrative that suggests two inconsistent responses: first, ‘this is what is said to have happened,’ and second, ‘this almost certainly is not what happened, at least in precisely the way described.’”<sup>42</sup>

Political myths are an essential part of modern political culture. They constitute that web of shared meaning by which the members of a complex society form and sustain their association. A political myth, as a representation of the nation, allows a complex social system to perceive itself as a unit, as an entity and to perceive this “unity” as something natural, self-evident. In other words, a political myth is both an explanation of social reality, and a constituent element of that reality, a stabilizing social influence.<sup>43</sup> That in the First World War conservative elites attempted to employ the narrative of the “spirit of 1914” as the most poignant representation of the German collective identity points not only to the power of this narrative, but also to a latent crisis of conservative legitimacy;<sup>44</sup> for this particular construction of collective memory represented a break with the collective memories that had governed Germany in the past.

Before 1914 German political culture was not national, but divided into partial political cultures. In spite of the efforts of government elites in socializing institutions such as the schools and the military, there were no unquestioned national “myths,” rather, Social Democrats worked hard to expose the conservative narratives as ideology, as the expression of class interests. The ideological differences in Wilhelmine Germany were profound: if what contemporaries termed the bourgeois ideology was, in its own words, “*staatserhaltend*,” that is, upholding the state, the working-class ideology was “revolutionary.” The right tried to unite the bourgeois parties against the red menace to culture and decency (*Sammlungspolitik*). The left accused the right of immorality – Socialist newspapers published all the tawdry scandals of Wilhelmine society, exposing the moral injustices of a class society.<sup>45</sup> The ideological and class divisions were even reflected in the existence of at least two of almost

<sup>42</sup> Northrop Frye, “The Koine of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language,” in *Myth and Metaphor. Selected Essays 1974–1988* (Charlottesville, 1990), p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbane, 1967), p. 159.

<sup>44</sup> Andreas Dörner, *Politischer Mythos und symbolische Politik* (Opladen, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture. Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1985). On the concept of partial political cultures, see Detlef Lehnert and Klaus Megerle (eds.), *Politische Identität und Nationale Gedenktage. Zur politischen Kultur in der Weimarer Republik* (Opladen, 1989).

every form of sociability: a Social Democratic and a *bürgerlich* singing society, gymnastic, swimming, or bicycling club, a Social Democratic and a *bürgerlich* newspaper, theater, or library.

In 1916, by contesting the “history” of the conservative narrative of the “spirit of 1914,” Theodor Wolff attempted to expose the conservative narrative as ideology, much as Social Democratic authors had done before 1914. Yet in the First World War Wolff was a lonely actor. Almost all other participants in political discourse in the First World War subscribed to the narrative that in the 1914 experiences German society became a German community. Like Kessel, almost all participants in political discourse in Germany during the First World War hoped to accumulate political capital by identifying their ideology with the “spirit of 1914.” In this political discourse the “spirit of 1914” was employed as a metaphor for one’s own political ideology. These efforts at identification were most bluntly stated in a 1919 campaign poster: “Vote DNVP [German National People’s Party, that is, the Conservative Party], we are the spirit of 1914.” Yet radical nationalists, a political movement with its institutional basis in the Pan-German League, likewise claimed that in the “spirit of 1914” all Germans had become Pan-Germans. Social Democrats and democratic liberals asserted that the willingness of all citizens in 1914 to assist in the defence of the nation proved that the nation was composed of competent, mature citizens. A reform of the Bismarckian constitution would provide a healthier, a stronger state, would uphold the “spirit of 1914.”

If the discourse on the “spirit of 1914” had been limited to debates over the nature of political ideology the symbol would not have attained the power it did, would not have been so widely accepted. Yet the war was a collective experience; the German people needed to know what they were fighting for, what they were dying for. There were many appeals during the war to sustain German unity; very often these appeals were couched as a call to sustain the “spirit of 1914.” The unity of 1914 would be conserved by subscribing to a shared memory of these experiences, that is, it was both a story that described the group to itself and the means by which that group, by holding the story sacred, sustained its community.

The narrative of the “spirit of 1914” attained its widespread acceptance, however, not only because it spoke to a need to understand the origins and nature of the German collectivity, a need for representation, but also by becoming a part of the strategy for winning the war. There were two different forms of the myth of the “spirit of 1914” during the war, reflecting two different functions. There was a social myth, a collective narrative of a past event, a representation of the nation. Alongside it was what I term a transcendent myth, a claim that through faith one could



overcome difficulties that could not be overcome through a more rational approach. In German propaganda the myth of the “spirit of 1914” was a means of mobilizing enthusiasm. The successes of the German army against a numerically superior opponent were interpreted as the product of a greater faith against an overly rational opponent, a victory of “faith over disbelief.”<sup>46</sup> In the words of Gustav Stresemann in 1917, “it was this spirit that has produced the victory of the minority over the majority.”<sup>47</sup> As morale declined and the “enthusiasm” faded, propagandists repeatedly invoked the “spirit of 1914.” In 1917 a propaganda officer, Spickernagel, asked his fellow officers to work to bring back the “spirit of 1914.”

this “spirit of 1914,” which is still alive in the army, this spirit of manliness and the happy and willing incorporation of the individual in the whole, this faithful and unshakeable trust in the leadership and in one’s own strength, . . . to reawaken this spirit is the key to our propaganda.<sup>48</sup>

Till the very end of the war Germans hoped that victory would come through total commitment, that the army possessing – in Fichte’s oft quoted words – “holy enthusiasm” would defeat the army lacking it. Thus, in propagandistic discourse the myth not only described the community that the soldiers were dying for, it also discussed eternal, transcendent, religious questions, offering hope to the believers. In other words, it valorized a mythological as opposed to a critical epistemology. Faith was opposed to rationality, belief to critical thought.

These two forms of the myth served different functions, and met different intellectual and emotional needs. The social myth spoke to the need to represent to the German people the nation that they were fighting and dying for; the transcendent myth spoke to the need to find a way out of this crisis.<sup>49</sup> Any study of the myth of the spirit of 1914 must not only describe the genealogy of the myth – the various forms of the narrative as it developed over the years – it must also treat the specific ways in which various groups and ideologies constructed their version of the myth, and analyze the context in which the propagation of the myth took place.

<sup>46</sup> Rudolf Borchardt, *Der Krieg und die deutsche Selbsteinkehr. Rede öffentlich gehalten am 5. Dezember 1914 zu Heidelberg* (Heidelberg, 1915), pp. 10–11.

<sup>47</sup> Gustav Stresemann, *Deutsche Gegenwart und Zukunft. Vortrag gehalten in Stuttgart am 18. November 1917* (Stuttgart, 1917), pp. 3–4. Similarly, Arden Buchholz, *Glaube ist Kraft!* (Stuttgart, 1917), Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Ideal und Macht*, second edition (Munich, 1916), J. Kessler, *Unser Glaube ist Sieg* (Dresden, 1915), and Gertrud Prellwitz, *Durch welche Kräfte wird Deutschland siegen? Religiöse Vorträge* (Jena, 1914).

<sup>48</sup> Stanford, Hoover Collection Archives, Moenkmoeller collection, Box 3, Liste no. 833–837, p. 6 of brochure.

<sup>49</sup> See Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (Cambridge, 1985); and Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (Vierow, 1996).

# 1 Public opinion in Germany, July 1914: the evidence of the crowds

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## **Newspapers as a source for studying German public opinion in 1914**

How can one study public opinion, defined here as the sum of individual opinions on a specific issue, in an era before public-opinion polls? The greatest difficulty is in finding the sources that allow us to recreate a representative sample, one which recognizes the differences in occupation, class, age, gender, and geography. In their path-breaking works on French public opinion in the First World War Jean-Jacques Becker and P. J. Flood were able to employ a rich variety of unpublished contemporary governmental reports, often written by local schoolteachers.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, German government officials were neither as diligent nor as curious as their French counterparts. In August 1914 the Prussian government, perceiving a sufficiently patriotic population, cancelled the customary quarterly reports on the events and mood of the local population (*Zeitungsberichte*), as well as the reports on the state of the Social Democratic and anarchistic “movement,” asking government officials to concentrate on other, more pressing duties.<sup>2</sup> Those governmental reports on public opinion which do exist either start too late – as with the reports of the Berlin Police Chief, the first of which is dated 22 August 1914,<sup>3</sup> or are little more than one official’s readings of the newspapers, as with the “public-opinion” reports prepared by Geheimrat von Berger for the Prussian Interior Ministry,<sup>4</sup> or simply state that there was nothing excep-

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker, *1914: comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre* (Paris, 1977); P. J. Flood, *France 1914–1918: Public Opinion and the War Effort* (New York, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> The proclamation of the Prussian Interior Minister of 18 August 1914 is in GhStAPK, Rep. 2II, no. 2811, Bd. 7.

<sup>3</sup> These have been edited and published by Ingo Materna and Hans-Joachim Schreckenbach (eds.), *Dokumente aus geheimen Archiven. Band 4: 1914–1918. Berichte des Berliner Polizeipräsidenten zur Stimmung und Lage der Bevölkerung in Berlin 1914–1918* (Weimar, 1987). The reports of the local political police, on which these reports are based, are generally more interesting, and are only excerpted in this edition. They can be found in BLA, Rep. 30 Berlin C, Tit. 95, Sect. 7, nos. 15805–15806.

<sup>4</sup> The “reports on the mood of the population,” prepared by Berger, can be found in GhStAPK, Rep. 77, Tit. 949, no. 20. They are biased in as much as the Prussian Minister of the Interior used these reports to support his calls for more propaganda.

tional to report.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, almost all the reports reflect more the prejudices of their author than the public opinion the authors were supposed to be describing.

In theory it should be possible to put together a representative sample of private letters and diaries. Yet, although there are many letters and diaries in archives and libraries, most of those who wrote diaries and letters in 1914 and, more importantly, who deposited their letters and diaries in libraries and archives, belonged to the middle or upper class, or were soldiers at the front. We lack the letters and diaries of farmers, the working class, the lower middle class, or, in general, of those waiting at home.<sup>6</sup> Although we can use the material collected in archives for an occasional insight it will not serve as the foundation for a broad study.

The student of German public opinion in 1914, unable to rely upon archival material, is forced therefore to turn to published material. Yet which texts? Memoirs have been cited by many historians as evidence of widespread enthusiasm for, as Hanna Hafkebrink has noted, most memoirs describe an “ecstatic expression of happiness” in 1914. Yet most memoirs were written by the educated elite.<sup>7</sup> Just as important, most were written years after the event. As Paul Fussell has shown for English First World War memoirs, such memoirs provide more evidence concerning the a priori with which the authors organized their experiences than evidence about their authentic feelings or the feelings of those around them.<sup>8</sup> In Germany memory was even less likely than in Great Britain to be objective, for after the creation of a social memory around the “spirit of 1914” how well could one remember what one had felt in 1914? Even if one did remember, how likely was one to tell the truth? The National

<sup>5</sup> These are the problems with the only governmental reports on the mood of the population in August 1914 (that I have found). These reports were prepared by two very ambitious *Regierungspräsidenten*, in Trier and in Düsseldorf. The underlying problem is that the mood of the population was one of the criteria for advancement in the Prussian bureaucracy. Thus, there was always a tendency to depict the mood of one's own population in rosy terms. For Trier, see GhStAPK, Rep 77, Tit. 332r, no. 68; for Düsseldorf, see GhStAPK, Rep 77, Tit. 332r, no. 123; HStA Düsseldorf, Landratsamt Düsseldorf, no. 201; and HStA Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf Regierung, Politische Akten, no. 14911. In Bavaria, all local government officials responded to a request by the Bavarian government for information concerning problems during the mobilization with: “none”. HStA Munich, Abt. IV – Kriegsarchiv, Stellv. GK des IAK, no. 955.

<sup>6</sup> Bernd Ulrich has analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of this source in “Feldpostbriefe im Ersten Weltkrieg. Bedeutung und Zensur,” in Peter Knoch (ed.), *Kriegsalltag* (Stuttgart, 1989), pp. 40–83; and in *Die Augenzeugen. Deutsche Feldpostbriefe in Krieg und Nachkriegszeit, 1914–1933* (Essen, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Hanna Hafkebrink, *Unknown Germany. An Inner Chronicle of the First World War based on Letters and Diaries* (New Haven, 1948), p. 30. The only detailed working-class memoir I could find is Karl Retzlaw, *Spartacus: Aufstieg und Niedergang. Erinnerungen eines Parteiarbeiters* (Frankfurt/Main, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford, 1975).

Liberal lawyer and member of parliament, Eugen Schiffer, who was in Berlin in July and August 1914, wrote in his private diary that the population was depressed. In his published memoirs, however, written forty years later, after Schiffer had been Finance Minister and Vice-Chancellor during the Weimar Republic, and President of the "German Administration for Justice" in the Soviet occupation zone, Schiffer wrote that "Germany" had been enthusiastic at the beginning of the war.<sup>9</sup>

Only contemporary sources avoid the danger of looking back at the August experiences through the lens of the narrative of the "spirit of 1914," only contemporary sources reveal the individual experiences before the memory of the 1914 experiences became a social memory. Yet here, too, which texts? Many historians, arguing that a nation's public opinion is expressed by its intellectual elite, the group who, in Mannheim's famous phrase, "provide an interpretation of the world for that society," have concentrated on the contemporary writings of Germany's intellectual elite.<sup>10</sup> This approach produces a perception of a widespread German "war enthusiasm" for, as Thomas Mann noted in 1915, in 1914 most German intellectuals "sang as if in competition with each other the praises of war, with deep passion, as if they and the people, whose voice they are, saw nothing better, nothing more beautiful than to fight many enemies."<sup>11</sup> Yet language and culture were hotly debated in Wilhelmine Germany. Between 1890 and 1914 Social Democratic "intellectuals" developed an oppositional, "working-class" culture, developed what Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge have termed a "counter public realm," with their own newspapers, magazines, theaters, and clubs.<sup>12</sup> The ideas of academic intellectuals were hardly the only ideas for Germans to choose from. Moreover, one must keep in mind that in the First World

<sup>9</sup> Schiffer's diary is in BA Koblenz, NI Eugen Schiffer, no. 3 – Tagebuch. His memoir is *Ein Leben für den Liberalismus* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 26 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1964), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Mann, "Gedanken im Krieg," *Die Neue Rundschau* (November 1914), p. 1473. Klaus Vondung, "Geschichte als Weltgericht," in Klaus Vondung (ed.), *Kriegserlebnis. Der erste Weltkrieg in der literarischen Gestaltung und symbolischen Deutung der Nationen* (Göttingen, 1980), p. 64; Klaus-Peter Philippi, *Volk des Zorns: Studien zur 'poetischen Mobilmachung' in der deutschen Literatur zu Beginn des 1. Weltkrieges, ihren Voraussetzungen und Implikationen* (Munich, 1979); Klaus Schröter, "Der Chauvinismus und seine Tradition. Deutsche Schriftsteller und der Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs," in *Literatur und Zeitgeschichte. Fünf Aufsätze zur deutschen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Mainz, 1970), pp. 7 ff.; and Eckart Koester, *Literatur und Weltkriegsideologie* (Kronberg, 1977) see a general war enthusiasm on the basis of literary texts; as does Klaus Schwabe, in *Wissenschaft und Kriegsmoral. Die deutschen Hochschullehrer und die politischen Grundfragen des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Göttingen, 1969), on the basis of published texts by German professors.

<sup>12</sup> Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge in *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (Frankfurt/Main, 1973). More generally, see Vernon L. Lidtke, *The Alternative Culture. Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1985).

War government officials censored any history of the August experiences that varied from the official narrative of the “spirit of 1914.” The only journalist during the war who attempted to criticize the official narrative, Theodor Wolff, was harshly punished for his temerity.

Recognizing that intellectual discourse can not by itself be considered equivalent with public opinion, some historians have chosen to analyze the statements of the leaders of the political parties on a particular issue. Within this analytic framework the Social Democratic Party’s vote for war credits on 4 August is viewed as evidence of working-class support for the war.<sup>13</sup> Yet election results do not provide a precise gauge of the mood of the public on a specific issue. It is by no means clear that because one voted for the Social Democratic Party in 1912 one agreed with the party’s vote on 4 August 1914. As a practical matter, parliament met only briefly on 4 August before recessing until December 1914.

We are required to rely upon newspapers. Fortunately, newspapers provide a rich and representative sample of published public opinion.<sup>14</sup> Wilhelmine Germany had a rich newspaper culture, with over 3,600 newspapers. The larger cities had at least two newspapers; Berlin had over fifty. Most of these newspapers published daily; some of the larger newspapers, such as those in Berlin, had three daily editions. Most had a small circulation. Yet some newspapers in the larger cities had a circulation of around half a million. Not only were there many newspapers, newspaper culture was highly variegated and distinctly segregated. In 1914 all political parties had their own official or semi-official newspapers, which were either the “spokesman” for the party, or the place to find out the party line on any particular issue. The Social Democratic Party had *Vorwärts*; the Progressive Party (*Fortschrittliche Volkspartei*) had the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and the *Vossische Zeitung*; the National Liberals had the *Kölnische Zeitung* and the *Magdeburgische Zeitung*; the Center Party had the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*; traditional conservatives had the *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, better known as the *Kreuz-Zeitung*; the agrarian conservatives had the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*; and the radical nationalist, or

<sup>13</sup> This is especially the case with Social Democratic historians. See Susanne Miller, *Burgfrieden und Klassenkampf. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf, 1974); and Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionäre Attentismus. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges*. (Frankfurt/Main, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> The best overview of the Wilhelmine press is in Klaus Wernecke, *Der Wille zur Weltgeltung. Aussenpolitik und Öffentlichkeit im Kaiserreich am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Düsseldorf, 1970), pp. 11–25. Peter Fritzsche’s *Reading Berlin* (Cambridge, 1996) has a superb description of the popular press of Berlin around the turn of the century. Unfortunately, Fritzsche’s analysis of the impact of this media, i.e., that it helped create an urban consciousness, a local identity that transcended class boundaries, exaggerates the power of the press and underestimates the powerful traditions and experience of class identity.

Pan-German right had the *Tägliche Rundschau*, the *Deutsche Zeitung*, and the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*. The *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (and much of the smaller provincial press) presented the views of the government.

In this hotly contested market the press could with some justice be considered the voice of public opinion. In the words of one contemporary journalist:

the newspaper has a fine nose for the changes in weather in the mood and opinions of its readership. The readership and the newspaper react to each other, and in the degree to which a newspaper is capable of bringing its opinion into harmony with that of a large part of the population, so, too, grows its power and importance; so, too, it becomes the voice of the people.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, the press not only reflected “public opinion,” it also shaped it, as mediator, as agency. Fellow travellers within a political community, be he or she a reader of the conservative *Kreuz-Zeitung* or the Social Democratic *Vorwärts*, tended to look to their newspaper for instruction.

Accordingly, many contemporaries interested in studying public opinion turned first to the press. The political police in Hamburg began their investigations by reading the lead articles of a broad spectrum of newspapers.<sup>16</sup> When in the last week of July 1914 newspapers described “The Mood in Germany” these articles consisted either of quotes from the lead articles of a spectrum of newspapers, or descriptions of the crowds in the streets.<sup>17</sup> Examining the lead articles of a set of newspapers from different political directions should therefore provide one with a literary seismograph of the different strains of public opinion; the newspaper descriptions of the crowds in the streets should provide one with the evidence we need to develop our own account of the August experiences.

In his superb study of newspaper opinion in July and August 1914 Theo Goebel concluded that in July 1914 the bourgeois and conservative press was generally bellicose, whereas the SPD press was anti-war, and harshly critical of the government.<sup>18</sup> Although bourgeois newspapers recognized

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Dammert, “Die Aufgabe der Presse,” *Zeitungs-Verlag* 16, no. 44 (29 October 1915), p. 958.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, the newspaper clippings in Staatsarchiv Hamburg, Politische Polizei, S20132, vol. 9 – Verbote der Friedensdemonstration der Sozialdemokratie.

<sup>17</sup> For example: “Die Stimmung in Deutschland,” *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, 25 July 1914 (Abend), no. 890, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Theo Goebel, *Deutsche Pressestimmen in der Julikrise 1914* (Stuttgart, 1939). In spite of its publication date, this is not a piece of National Socialist historiography. It remains the best study of German newspaper opinion during these days, although it has recently been supplemented by Thomas Reithel, *Das “Wunder” der inneren Einheit. Studien zur deutschen*

that the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia on 23 July meant war, with the exception of the radical nationalist *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* and the *Post* they approved the Austrian action; there was surprisingly little deviation in the interpretations of the left-liberal, the National Liberal, and the conservative press. They hoped, however, that the coming war between Austria and Serbia would remain localized.<sup>19</sup> If the war could not be localized, if Russia should intervene, bourgeois newspapers declared that Germany was willing to stand by Austria. As many newspapers recognized that it was likely that Russia would intervene, they in essence accepted German involvement in a coming war.<sup>20</sup>

In the next week many bourgeois newspapers began to employ the heroic tropes that would dominate the pages of the press in the first week of August. A *Weser-Zeitung* (liberal) journalist wrote on 26 July that although war is terrible, peace is not worth retaining if Austria is to be humbled, ending with a quote from Schiller:

we cannot allow Austria to go under. For then we would ourselves be in danger of becoming a part of the larger Russian colossus, with its barbarism. We must struggle now in order to win ourselves our freedom and our peace. The storm from the east and the west will be enormous but the ability, the courage, and the sacrifice of our army will shine through. Every German will feel the glorious duty of being worthy of the forefathers of Leipzig and Sedan. A single pulse will run through every German's veins:

Only he who is willing to lose his life  
Can win it.

(Und setzet Ihr nicht das Leben ein,  
Nie wird Euch das Leben gewonnen sein.)<sup>21</sup>

This heroic trope was constructed in order to prepare Germans for war. A stereotypical description of the enemy followed a similar aim. The

*und französischen Öffentlichkeit bei Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Bonn, 1986). For a list of the newspapers I have read see the bibliography. There is a very useful and immense compilation of excerpts from German newspapers from July to October 1914 in Eberhard Buchner (ed.), *Kriegsdokumente. Der Weltkrieg 1914/15 in der Darstellung der zeitgenössischen Presse* (Munich, 1914–1917). The literature on the outbreak of the First World War is enormous. The two best discussions of German policy during July 1914 are Fritz Fischer's courageous *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967); and Volker R. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (London, 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Some of the reactions to the note are excerpted in Buchner (ed.), *Kriegsdokumente*, vol. I, pp. 10 ff. See Goebel, *Deutsche Pressestimmen in der Julikrise 1914*, pp. 73 ff. Among bourgeois newspapers only the left-liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung* expressed doubts about the Austrian foreign policy without, however, directly criticizing it.

<sup>20</sup> "Oesterreichs Note bei Freund und Feind. Einmischung Rußlands," *Magdeburgische Zeitung*, 25 July 1914, no. 543 (Morgen).

<sup>21</sup> "Krieg oder Nichtkrieg," *Weser-Zeitung*, 26 July 1914 (zweite Morgen-Ausgabe, no. 24350), p. 1.

Social Democratic *Bremer Bürger-Zeitung* noted that “with the revolver shots in Sarajevo an epoch of the wildest agitation against everything which is Serbian or Slavic has begun . . . in all bourgeois papers the pan-Slavic danger is being painted in the most vivid colors.”<sup>22</sup> The *Kreuz-Zeitung* justified German assistance with “the absence of culture in the Balkans.” Russia was described as “Asiatic,” “barbaric,” and the coming battle as one between “Germans and Slavs.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Theo Goebel, writing in 1939, noted that he found “almost word for word the same arguments and calumny” in July 1914 against Pan-Slavism as were employed in German newspapers in 1939 against Bolshevism.<sup>24</sup>

Although such rhetoric was bellicose almost all newspapers hoped that the war could be localized, either between Serbia and Austria, or between Serbia and Austria and Germany and Russia; that is, journalists hoped that the French and English would not participate. Only Pan-Germans openly called for a preventative war. The Pan-German leader Heinrich Class wrote on 25 July in the *Alldeutsche Blätter* that:

our law must be: to stand by Austria to the last man – with all our might, in the awareness that we are not to be permitted to lose – and no matter what may come – to use this opportunity to the full for the noble inner cleansing of our people, for their rebirth.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast, the SPD press emphatically criticized the Austrian ultimatum. On 25 July *Vorwärts* published a proclamation painting war in the darkest terms: “unemployed men, widowed women, and orphaned children.” The SPD blamed Austria for working “directly to provoke war,” and stated:

the class-conscious proletariat protests in the name of humanity and culture against the criminal actions of those agitating for war (*Kriegshetzer*) . . . Not one drop of German blood should be sacrificed for the power-hungry Austrian rulers and the imperialistic profit interests.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout the following week, up till the imposition of censorship with the state of siege on 31 July, SPD newspapers continued to describe

<sup>22</sup> “Der Popanz des Panslawismus,” *Bremer Bürger-Zeitung*, 9 July 1914, no. 157, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> “Europas Schicksalsstunde,” *General-Anzeiger* (Dortmund), 27 July 1914, p. 1; and “Vor der Entscheidung,” *Alldeutsche Blätter* 24, no. 31 (1 August 1914), p. 277. The *Kreuz-Zeitung* is quoted in Theo Goebel, *Deutsche Pressestimmen in der Julikrise 1914*, p. 33. “Asiatic” is from *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*, quoted in “Die Sozialdemokratie gegen den Krieg,” *Kreuz-Zeitung*, 26 July 1914, no. 345 (Morgen), p. 2. “Barbaric” is from “Der Menschheit heilige Rechte,” *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, quoted in Goebel, *Deutsche Pressestimmen in der Julikrise 1914*, pp. 194–195.

<sup>24</sup> Goebel, *Deutsche Pressestimmen in der Julikrise 1914*, p. 213.

<sup>25</sup> Heinrich Class, *Alldeutsche Blätter*, no. 31, quoted in Lothar Werner, *Der Alldeutsche Verband 1890–1918* (Berlin, 1935), pp. 198–199.

<sup>26</sup> “Aufruf,” *Vorwärts*, 25 July 1914, no. 200a (Extra).



war's horrors, continued to argue that Germany should not fight for Austria.<sup>27</sup>

Such criticism was expected. More exceptional was the criticism of Austria by *Die Post* (Berlin) and the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* (Essen), both controlled by heavy industry, both known to have ties to the Pan-German League, and both often criticized before 1914 for their chauvinism. These newspapers warned Germany on 25–27 July not to undertake a world war for the defence of Austria. The *Post*, for example, wrote:

If in fact the Austrian government has gone forward entirely on its own responsibility and has neglected getting in touch with Berlin, then the responsibility for its step which this time, in truth, leaves nothing to be desired in the matter of energy, falls back on it alone. Austria-Hungary goes forward independently? Good. Then let her go forward independently. We can wait.<sup>28</sup>

The *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* wrote that “we are not required to support Habsburg wars of aggression.”<sup>29</sup>

Late on 29 July newspapers reported that the Russian mobilization, which would bring with it the German mobilization and war, was near.<sup>30</sup> When the next day extras told of the Russian mobilization the news was consumed by a public well prepared for it. On 31 July 1914, German newspapers discussed the proclamation of the state of siege and the German ultimatum to Russia, due to expire early the next day. Most bourgeois newspapers hoped for peace, although they recognized that a war might be just over the horizon.<sup>31</sup> In general, bourgeois newspapers on 31 July reflected a mood of tense waiting. Many articles stated – often in the same paragraph – their hope that war would not come and their belief that if war did come it would be a just war, and a war for which Germany was well prepared.

The SPD leadership, in contrast, published an extra on 31 July calling for mass demonstrations on Sunday, 2 August, “for peace and against the

<sup>27</sup> For example, “Der Auftakt zum Weltkrieg,” *Vorwärts*, 26 July 1914, no. 201, p. 1; and “Bluthunde, Massenmörder und Volksunterdrücker wollen den Weltkrieg heraufbeschwören,” *Volksfreund* (Braunschweig), 27 July 1914, no. 172, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Scott, *Five Weeks. The Surge of Public Opinion on the Eve of the Great War* (New York, 1927), p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> “Habsburgische Gewaltpolitik,” *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, 24 July 1914 (Abend), p. 1. On the divisions within the Pan-German League in 1914, see the book by the editor of the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, Theodor Riesmann-Grone, *Der Erdenkrieg und die Alldeutschen* (Mülheim, 1919).

<sup>30</sup> “Der Entscheidung entgegen,” “Direkt vor der Entscheidung,” and “Bisher keine Mobilmachung,” are, for example, the headlines of the lead articles in the *Magdeburgische Zeitung* on 30 and 31 July 1914, nos. 557–559 respectively.

<sup>31</sup> “Die Krise ist noch nicht überstanden,” *Köliner Zeitung*, 31 July 1914, no. 177, p. 1.

warmongers (*Kriegshetzer!*).”<sup>32</sup> These were strong words. Yet careful readers of the SPD press in the last week of peace also noted that although most SPD newspapers were stridently anti-war some Social Democratic newspapers reminded readers of the party’s traditional dislike of Russia, even evoking a fear not only of Russian autocracy but of the Russian population.<sup>33</sup> Some SPD journalists and politicians openly stated that if war came the working class would join in the defence of the fatherland. Friedrich Stampfer, who would later become the editor of *Vorwärts*, wrote that the coming war would decide the “existence or non-existence” of Germany. A defeat of Germany would be:

something unthinkable, horrible. If war alone is the most horrible of horrors, this war is made even more gruesome by the fact that it is not being fought between civilized nations . . . we do not desire that our women and children should be the victims of the cossack’s bestialities.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, the “public opinion” reflected in the lead articles of the newspapers in July 1914 speaks neither of a broad “war enthusiasm” nor of German unity. Most bourgeois newspapers hoped that the war could be localized and couched the coming war as defensive, as necessary, as historic, as inevitable. Only a few embraced the war as a positive good. Social Democratic newspapers supported the German diplomatic efforts but continued to publish articles describing the horror of war, labelling war an atrocity incompatible with civilization, and hoping that this war would soon end.<sup>35</sup>

Although aware that few newspapers openly called for war, the Viennese author and journalist Karl Kraus, in his scathing critique of German and Austrian newspaper opinion, “In these Great Times,” written in 1914, claimed that newspapers were in part responsible for engendering a climate of war enthusiasm. He did not assert that the newspapers were themselves “enthusiastic,” but that the press in its political commentary, with its tendency to simplify, to sensationalize, with its phrases and clichés, had “brought humanity to the point of such a lack of imagination that it is able to undertake a war of attrition against itself.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> “Das Ende der sozialdemokratischen Proteste,” *Deutsche Zeitung*, 3 August 1914, no. 385, (Morgen), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> For example, “Hände weg!,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, 26 July 1914, no. 852 (Sonder-Ausgabe), p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Friedrich Stampfer, “Sein oder Nichtsein,” quoted in Miller, *Burgfrieden und Klassenkampf*, p. 54; and Groh, *Negative Integration*, pp. 664–665.

<sup>35</sup> On 4 August 1914, for example, the *Rheinische Zeitung* wrote that “now the absolute horror has arrived . . . the World War has begun.” “Ernstes Tage,” *Rheinische Zeitung*, 4 August 1914, no. 178, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Kraus, “In dieser grossen Zeit,” in *Weltgericht I* (Frankfurt/Main, 1988), pp. 9–24. The quote is on p. 16. The talk was given on 19 November 1914.